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Leza L Olson 09/25/2006 01:16:22 PM From DB/Inbox: Leza L Olson

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 03794

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ACTION: ECON
INFO: PD AMB AID IPSC IMO SCI ADM FCS CONS RES POL
DCM

DISSEMINATION: ECON
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AMB:RJONES
DRAFTED: ECON:RRUFFER
CLEARED: DCM:GCRETZ, ECON:JWITOW, POL:MSIEVERS, USSC:MDUGGER

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INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 003794

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: GILAD DISCUSSES RAFAH, KARNI, AND AMA NEGOTIATIONS
WITH THE AMBASSADOR

REF: TEL AVIV 3782

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Ministry of Defense (MOD) Pol-Mil Director Amos Gilad placed a heavy emphasis on the situation at Rafah in a September 21 meeting with the Ambassador. He said that the GOI understands that pressure is rising at the crossing because of its closure, but said it would be difficult to reopen the crossing for normal operations until kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit is released. As he had done earlier with senior MFA officials (reftel), the Ambassador pushed for opening the crossing in honor of Ramadan to enable family visits and Umrah trips to Mecca. Gilad acknowledged that Ramadan is the "right time" to open the crossing, and that the GOI may do so for up to three days, starting Friday, September 22. (Note: He later called to say the crossing would be open Friday and Saturday. End note.) He added that the GOI is trying to keep Karni open as well, but there are many security problems, citing the recently discovered tunnel as an example. The Ambassador suggested that the GOI give a green light to USSC LTG Dayton to begin implementing the General's security plan for Karni. Gilad and advisers Haggai Alon and BGen Baruch Spiegel all indicated that there are "stomachaches" within the Israeli security establishment regarding the idea of having international observers at Karni. The Ambassador explained that the GOI could bless other parts of the Dayton plan even as it continued to mull over the proposal for international observers. He also noted that the USG would like to renew talks on implementing the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA). Gilad agreed in principle, and Spiegel reported that the GOI's structure would be similar to the one proposed by the Embassy. On the Palestinian effort to form a National unity Government (NUG), Gilad opined that it is risky for Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas to play games with Hamas because "there (might) be no government in the end." End summary.

Opening Rafah for Ramadan

12. (C) Ministry of Defense (MOD) Pol-Mil Director Amos Gilad told the Ambassador on September 21 the GOI recognizes the mounting pressure of humanitarian cases stranded at the Rafah crossing, and has heard the requests from Egypt to open the crossing. He noted, however, that it is closed because of kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit. (Note: As an aside, Gilad noted that not all the rumors about Shalit are true, but not all are false either. "In the Middle East you can have smoke without fire." End note.) The Ambassador said that LTG Pietro Pistolese, in charge of the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), has also requested that the crossing be open on September 22. Gilad confided that he and other MOD advisers would in fact recommend to Defense Minister Amir Peretz in their weekly staff meeting on the afternoon of the 21st that the crossing be opened the following day. He mentioned, however, that the defense minister may have a difficult time approving the opening because the GOI is constantly receiving intelligence reports of threats to personnel at the crossing.

13. (C) Gilad recognized the need to ease the pressure at Rafah, particularly in humanitarian cases, and said that it was a matter of "national security policy" for the GOI. The Ambassador explained that opening Rafah during Ramadan would be a sign of respect for Islam and may make it easier for Shalit's kidnappers to release him during this time. Gilad was skeptical, but admitted that Ramadan is the "right time" to open the crossing. The Ambassador asked whether an opening of the crossing would be temporary, and Gilad replied affirmatively, "as long as Shalit is not resolved." He said that although it may be a one-time opening, Rafah crossing could be open for as long as three days for Ramadan depending on events and intelligence reports. (In fact, the crossing was opened on September 22. Although it soon closed due to a shooting incident, it subsequently reopened.)

Renewing AMA Negotiations

14. (C) The Ambassador told Gilad that the USG wants to renew consultations on implementing the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA), and presented the Embassy core working groups on convoys, closures, West Bank-Gaza Strip link, economic development, and crossings. (Note: A copy of the Embassy's presentation has been emailed to NEA/IPA. End note.) He said that both parties involved have problems with the implementation of the agreement, and added that discussions should take place to improve the situation on the ground. Gilad agreed, and said that Israel's first priority is the Rafah agreement because it expires on November 15, which is "right around the corner." He said that the situation in Rafah is "very urgent," and that the parties should continue with the EUBAM presence and perhaps update the security zone. He said that ultimately there has to be "strategic change" at Rafah because opening the crossing on a day-to-day basis is not an acceptable policy. BGen (ret.) Baruch Spiegel said that the GOI's structure for the negotiations would be like the Embassy's, and that Gilad would be the GOI's lead.

15. (C) Gilad continued that the GOI is also "trying (its) best to keep Karni open" because there is no alternative to the crossing. He cited, however, the recently discovered tunnel as an example of the security problems at the crossing. He said that the GOI is not sure there is no other tunnel at Karni, and that the only way to find out is through "qualitative, focused intelligence," which takes time and is difficult to acquire. The Ambassador noted that USSC LTG Keith Dayton has a security plan for Karni, and wondered why the GOI could not go ahead and give him a green light to move forward on the plan. He said that if the GOI has problems with the USSC's plan, it should tell LTG Dayton, but if not, Israel should allow him to begin taking steps to implement it. Gilad reported that Peretz met with LTG Dayton and gave

a "green light" to go forward with the project, but added that as long as Shalit is not released, the GOI cannot continuously open the crossing. The Ambassador asked why Shalit's kidnapping is impacting movement on the security plan at Karni, and Gilad responded that the GOI cannot make "dramatic decisions" in favor of the Palestinians until Shalit is released. Gilad also commented that some Israeli government officials object to the idea of international observers at Karni. The Ambassador said that he is aware of that, but the GOI can allow other parts of the project that are not connected in any way to the presence of international observers to go forward while it deliberates.

¶6. (C) Senior Adviser Haggai Alon, speaking very frankly, said that the Dayton plan is "causing stomachaches to the security establishment." He said that, although he did not agree, security officials have a great fear of losing their autonomy and operational room for maneuver once international observers are present at Karni. He claimed that the security forces are worried that they "will not be as free as now;" and opined that this fear is without grounds, but "you'll hear it." Alon suggested that things would run smoothly at the end of the day, but Spiegel added that the debate in the GOI is still ongoing because the IDF in particular wants more freedom to undertake counterterrorism activities. He agreed with Alon that the IDF is worried its activities may be restricted, but assured the Ambassador that "we're working on it because the basic concept is agreed on." Gilad concluded that ultimately the Palestinians are "not doing their part" and need a lot of preparation, and the Ambassador replied that international observers would be beneficial precisely for this reason.

Palestinian NUG

¶7. (C) Gilad and Alon asked the Ambassador about the Quartet's recent statements on the Palestinian National Unity Government (NUG). The Ambassador said that the Israeli press is overreacting, and that Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas is succeeding in putting pressure on Hamas. He explained that Abbas's progress with Ismail Haniya surprised the leadership in Damascus, which is now trying to push back. He commented that the Quartet welcomes Abu Mazen's effort, but would only embrace a NUG that accepted the Quartet's three principles. The idea was to put the onus on Hamas for a failure to form a NUG, which would weaken it while strengthening Abbas. Gilad opined that this is a risky maneuver because "there (might) be no (PA) government in the end" and Hamas's presence in the Palestinian Legislative Council could thwart an Abbas effort to create an emergency government. The Ambassador said that perhaps a NUG would cause a split in Hamas. Gilad disagreed and said that the Palestinians would probably then go to new elections with Hamas winning again, but he admitted to not being sure about the likely outcome of an election.

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JONES